

DO AND DARE

A FAVORITE WEEKLY OF YOUNG AMERICA



PHIL



WALT



DORA



LENA

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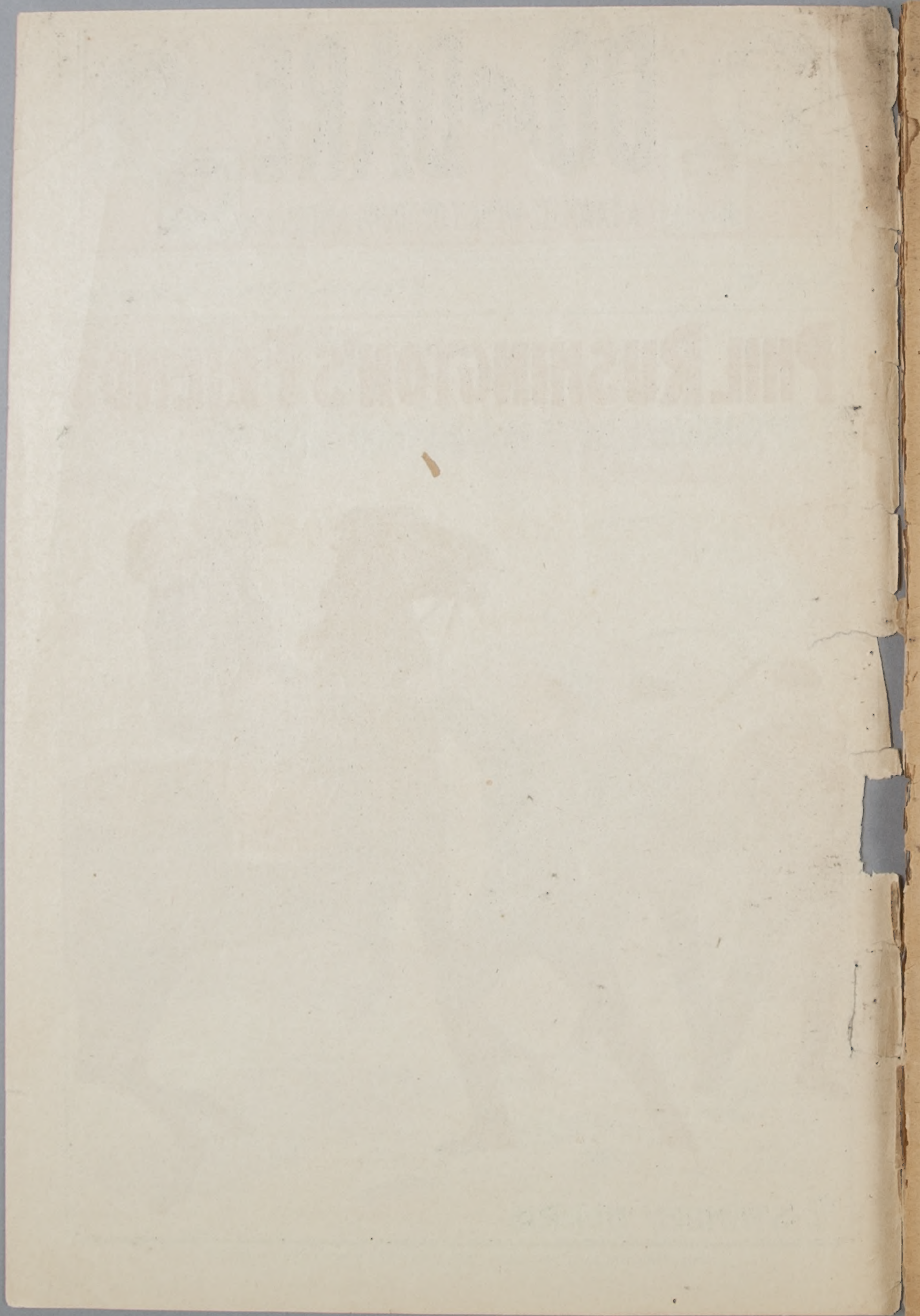
PHIL RUSHINGTON'S FRIENDS

OR SPRINGVALE BOYS IN A LUMBER CAMP



BY STANLEY NORRIS

RUSH PLIED THE LASH VIGOROUSLY ABOUT THE MAN'S HEAD AND SHOULDERS.



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Phil Rushington's Friends;

OR,

SPRINGVALE BOYS IN A LUMBER CAMP.

By STANLEY NORRIS.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE ADIRONDACK FOREST.

With guns and fishing tackle; with eyes that became brighter and cheeks that glowed more healthily day by day; with songs and shouts and jests and laughter; with a "Canuck" guide and teamster with his sled and scraggy horse to fetch heavier tools and tackle for a winter camp in the woods—it was so that Philip Rushington and two of his comrades from Springvale Academy penetrated Adirondack wilds in quest of sport royal—and—I will whisper it—something else.

Rush and John Grayson had started on the expedition more than two weeks before the hour from which these events are dated. They got as far as New York, but were detained there by unforeseen adventures and duties. Grayson, in haste to get away from

the city, had finally started on ahead, and it was he who first reached the point from which the actual start had to be made.

Grayson purchased the stores and tools and engaged the guide with his team. Rush and Vinton had nothing to do when they reached the edge of the wilderness except to go ahead, and to guy the Canuck teamster, whose pigeon-English promised to furnish them with not a little amusement before the end of their journey should be reached.

"How about roads?" Rush asked of Joe, the Frenchman, the first time one side of the sled sunk into a slough and dumped its load into the snow.

"Road? Oh, he all right," said Joe, complacently, as he set about righting the sled and digging out the utensils.

"And that shaft of your sled, which I see is in three pieces?" pursued Rush, with just

a shade of genuine anxiety. For there really seemed to be a blooming chance of the team being laid up for repairs for a half day at least.

"Dat shaft? Oh, I feex him all right! He just doubled in two, zat's all, and I feex him mighty queeck."

The scraggy horse docilely hauled the sled out of the slough, and Joe set about splicing the broken shaft as leisurely as though he had studied philosophy, and held to the theory that time is merely a form of consciousness.

"We might as well jog along," said Vint, whose long legs could measure a mile seemingly without effort.

"We might get off the road with our guide in the rear," suggested Grayson.

"What road?" demanded Rush, with a comical pretense of looking for a track through the wilderness.

"Any old thing will pass for a road in this region," growled Vint, as he sprang over the back of the horse, which stood across the trail like a section of fence.

Rush followed suit; but Gray, with his forty years, tried to pass in front of the beast, who nipped viciously at his shoulder.

"Those Canuck horses all like meat more than they do hay," laughed Rush, as Gray paused to see how much of himself had gone to feed the animal.

"That brute was never taught to say grace before meat," said Grayson, with a grimace.

"Methinks I heard him say, 'Gray,' if not grace," chuckled Vint.

"I suppose pain is good for a man, or he wouldn't have so much of it given to him," said Grayson, who had been in a repentant mood since leaving the big city behind.

"Gray is a great fellow to impose penances on himself," remarked Vint. "If he had lived four hundred years ago, he would have been a monk."

"It follows that if he had lived fourteen thousand years ago he would have been a monkey—if the evolution theory is worth anything," added Rush, without even a flicker of a smile.

"Catch and hold him for me, Vint! This thing has got to be stopped, or we'll have to put hoops onto Rushington's head!"

"Which would bring whoops out of his mouth!" howled Rush.

They made a dash for him, and then there was a bit of sprinting done which resulted in proof that length of legs do not always count in the matter of speed except in a walking pace. For Rush skipped over fallen trees, plunged through drifts of soft snow, darted this way and that with such speed and nimbleness that Gray and Vint were soon "winded" and fell to the rear.

As they halted to breathe, all heard a shout from the Frenchman, who had been left out of sight in the brief race.

"What is the matter now, I wonder?" Vint exclaimed.

"The rest of his rig gone to pieces, probably," said Gray.

"Rush's surveying instruments will need tuning up by the time we get to the place where he is to use them," suggested Vinton.

"On your life, don't call those things by their right names until we reach our destination, for even the trees may have ears," said Rushington, with an anxiety of tone which was not feigned.

"Of course not, Rush. Photographic outfit, I should have said. But they'll be smashed, just the same, if Frenchy keeps dumping them every time he sees a stump that it is possible to run against."

The shouts from Joe were distinct, and the trio were sure that they heard another voice from the same direction. Curiosity sent Rush and Vinton racing back to the

spot where the team had made its enforced halt.

There they saw Joe talking and gesticulating in front of a somewhat slenderly built fellow, who wore a tall shiny hat and a thin black overcoat, which might have been suitable for a cool day on Fifth avenue, but which appeared odd enough in a wintry wilderness.

"You make a beeg meestake, monsieur," Joe was saying.

"I was told that some young gentlemen were coming to this region in the interest of the proprietor of certain lumber property," declared the stranger, with a graceful wave of his daintily gloved hand.

"A very mighty beeg meestake, monsieur," insisted Joe.

So much Rush caught as he approached, and the words of the unknown man brought a flash of suspicion into Rushington's eyes.

"What is this?" Phil demanded, confronting the stranger with such abruptness that the other recoiled.

"Ah!—the leader of this expedition, may I ask?" was the polite inquiry.

"We don't call it an expedition, sir," said Rush. "We are some academy students out on a sporting trip. My name is Rushington, and this is Mr. Vinton."

"So! Honored to know you, gentlemen. I am Reginald Parker, sometimes called Professor Parker, and I hail from Albany—Utica, I mean! Queer that I should say Albany, when, as a matter of truth, I was never in that city in my life, and have no wish to go there. A sporting trip, you say, Mr. Rushington?"

"It will be sport if we don't have too serious a time getting there. But what may we do for you, Professor Parker?"

"I—er—to put it bluntly, am in need of a little assistance. I was on my way to a certain tract of timber land where some cutting is being done. I started with a guide, but

the fellow had a lot of liquor with him and succumbed to the influence—er—to put it bluntly, got beastly drunk. I had to leave him, and now I am, to be plain about it, embarrassed for certain necessaries of life. Hope you will pardon my being so brutally plain in my terms!"

Rush eyed the man keenly. Was he shamming? And if so, what was his intended game? He looked innocent, and yet there were too many peculiarities about him to be readily understood.

Vinton had been silent so far. But now he put in a word while Rush was thinking.

"You were saying something to our man as we came up, were you not?" Vint inquired.

"Yes. I was told that some young men were on this route to a timber tract which lies contiguous to my own—or, rather, the one which I represent."

"Ours is a sporting trip," said Vinton, and his gigantic size and sternness seemed to forbid him to question the truth of the statement.

"A mistake on the part of my informant, I daresay. But, in any case, you seem to be going my way, and as fellow-pilgrims in a wilderness, I trust that we may be friendly, and do each other a good turn?"

"Certainly, if you are hungry or cold, we will help you out. But we would not care to add a stranger permanently to our party," declared Rush.

The other, who had a thin, nervous face, adorned by a small reddish mustache, rubbed his chin with a thumb which protruded through a hole in the thin glove which he wore.

Rushington by this time had taken all the external points about the stranger.

The fellow's clothes had all been of the finest material in their day; but upon close inspection they proved to be sadly the worse

for wear. He wore thin shoes without overshoes of any kind, and the leather was cracked, and they showed their teeth at the soles. His coat was shiny, his tall hat had a dent in it, his gloves were mended, and yet needed mending.

More than this, there was a hungry look in his eyes which native politeness could not hide any more than it could have done in a well-trained dog.

The sympathies of Rushington were touched, and so somewhat of his caution disappeared.

"We shall go into camp in half an hour, and meanwhile you may get onto Joe's sled, which I see he has mended, and ride along. If you wanted to be trying your jaws on something, just to get them into practice, try this."

Rush was opening a box on the sled as he spoke, and he gave Professor Parker a sandwich which had real chicken in it.

The professor was evidently well-bred. Yet he downed that sandwich as a dog would have bolted a piece of meat.

"Seems to have no more effect on him than a chunk of scrap beef would have on a sausage-machine!" said Vint in a low tone.

"Just about the same. Shall I throw him another? He seems to be ashamed of his hurry, and I don't want to humiliate him too far."

"Throw him another, and we won't seem to notice what he does with it."

Rush got another sandwich, but just as he did so, and when Professor Parker was in the act of climbing onto the sled, all heard the tramp of horse's feet approaching at a gallop. And, without warning, the stranger leaped off the sled, plunged through the heaped up snow, and disappeared into the darkening forest on their right!

At the same time a horseman dashed into

view, and, with upraised revolver, fired after the fugitive!

CHAPTER II.

THE CONSTABLE'S WHIP.

At the beginning Phil Rushington's suspicions had made his impression of the stranger a most unfavorable one. But this prejudice gave place to pity when he saw that the fellow was actually suffering from hunger, and that his somewhat airy manners and shabby-genteel attire were indications of a proud nature which had been brought very low.

But never was Rush or his companions more astonished than they were when the horseman dashed into view and fired upon Professor Parker, as if the latter were a desperado.

Rush and Vint gave the new arrival a hasty but a searching look.

He was a large man, with a red face, coarse features, and big, staring eyes such as one may see in the head of an overbearing and boastful man. Yet there was an air of authority about him which could not be mistaken, and Rush was not surprised when the stranger wheeled his horse up to the spot where they stood, and exclaimed in a big voice:

"Didn't I see a man run off into the woods just now? Tell the truth, young fellow, unless you want to feel the weight of the hand of the law!"

The blood rushed to the cheeks of Phil Rushington. Nothing could more quickly arouse his temper than to be spoken to as if he were a youngster who could not be trusted to tell the truth unless he were threatened.

"How do I know what you saw?" was the quick retort that sprang from the lips of Rush.

"Take care! take care! I'm an officer of

the law, and in pursuit of my duty. I can't run my horse into such a thicket as the one yonder, but there is a way to fetch that fellow to a halt, if I am only sure he is the one I'm after. Didn't he wear a tall hat and black coat——"

"If you are in pursuit of your duty, keep chasing it, and don't waste your breath asking questions. If you want any facts, you will find it easier to get them if you're civil about it. Come, Joe, start your nag, or we won't get into camp to-night."

The last part of Phil's remark was addressed, of course, to the teamster. The latter started the horse, and Vint, who had already started on, quickened his strides.

Rush would have followed, but the horseman blocked his way.

"This won't do, young fellow!" the man said.

"Get out of my way!" ordered Rush. His voice was low, but the man had never before seen such an expression in the eyes of so young a man.

"It looks as if you were in league with that chap to help him to give me the slip," said the man.

"Perhaps I am—*quien sabe!*" retorted Rush, with a faint smile.

The red face of the man became a shade redder. He had a short riding whip, and before Rush could divine his audacious intent he had reached suddenly out with it and delivered a swift cut across the youth's shoulders.

The cut did not hurt—it was hardly felt, in fact—for Phil was heavily clad and the whip was light. But the act was of a kind to stir the temper of a spirited young fellow as nothing else could have done.

Vint was looking back at the moment. He uttered an ejaculation of dismay as he saw the whip of the officer fall. Then he

was treated to an exhibition which he would not soon forget.

Rush leaped forward, caught the whip in one hand and pulled it from the grasp of the man. At the same time he seized the horse's bridle, and held on with a grip of iron.

Whisk!—cut!—sounded the whip! The short lash fell first upon one of the man's big hands! Then it fell again and again and again, across hands, shoulders, neck and face of the officer!

A half dozen blows were thus delivered, so sharp and hard that each one left a red line where it touched. The man let out a roar of rage and pain, yanked at the reins, in a vain endeavor to goad the horse into a break-away, and lastly tumbled, rather than dismounted, from the back of the animal.

He fell full length on the ground, rolled over and over in the snow, and then scrambled to his feet several yards away from his assailant.

After the first roar of pain, not a sound escaped the lips of the officer. Rush let go of the bridle and flung the whip at the owner. The horse trotted away into the woods, but evidently with no intention of running away.

"Now continue in the pursuit of your duty, and don't get any more mistaken notions on the subject into your head!" said Rush, as he quietly joined Vint a little ahead of their team.

Joe was jabbering his excited and enthusiastic comments in the patois of his people, having allowed his team to get several lengths ahead of him.

"Great Scott, Rush!" growled Vint.

"Great Scott isn't in it when a man tries hitting me in that fashion," said Rush, a slight quiver in his voice.

"That man will whale you, if he ever catches you at a disadvantage. There is murder in his eye."

"Let him whale!"

"That isn't it. He won't be likely to tackle you in a fair fight, now that he has a specimen of your stuff. But if he is really an officer of the law he may manage to work up some kind of a nasty game that will detain us, if nothing worse."

"Let him do his worst; but he can never touch me with a whip without feeling it back, ten clips to one. He is a great, tyrannical boaster, and he thinks he owns the earth, and it is time that he learned something."

"He was in school and being tutored to beat the cars a minute ago!" laughed Vint.

It was fast growing dark in the woods, and Joe was whipping up his nag to get a quicker pace.

Rush did not care enough about the future movements of the officer to look back at him; but Vint saw that the man was wallowing through the snow after his horse. Both man and beast were now out of sight in the edge of the woods.

In ten minutes they reached a small natural opening, which could not be bettered as a place of encampment. A small stream not entirely choked up with ice, crossed their way, insuring water for all. They found Grayson already on the spot and gathering fuel, and selecting trees to which to attach the guy-ropes of their tent.

The latter was one of the snuggest affairs for winter camping ever made, and nobody but Rush knew the cost of it. He had it made to order after plans of his own; and, when it was properly set up, it was as warm as a house. A camp stove with funnel completed the comfort of the equipment, and in half an hour the little party were enjoying a hot dinner with coffee, and they did not even have to partake of it with chilled fingers and tingling noses, as is usually the case in a winter camp at night.

Vint told Gray of the encounter betwixt

Rush and the officer, and Gray laughed heartily at the account.

"It must have been a sight for the gods, Rush chastising a mounted constable with his own whip!" he exclaimed.

"Vint and Joe were the only gods who happened to be at hand when the deck was cleared for action," laughed Rush.

"We'll hear from the constable again, see if we don't," predicted Vinton.

"I'm not so sure on that point," said Gray. "A man can't afford to face the boy who has given him a drubbing, unless he is plumb sure of getting even in the next bout. And Rush had a witness to swear that the man struck the first blow. There may be a nasty attempt at a vengeful trick of some kind, of course. But there will be nothing like an effort to interfere with us in a legal way."

"There may be enough of legal business on hand of another kind before we get to the end of this expedition," said Rush.

When this was said Joe was sound asleep in a corner of the lodge, and the trio were sitting in front of the stove. Gray was puffing at his pipe and Vint sucked at a cigarette, which looked insignificant enough in the mouth of such a big fellow.

Rush did not smoke. For this there was another reason besides that of principle, although the latter might at that time have been a sufficient one to deter him from tying himself to the habit.

The truth was that he had tried hard to smoke, but each attempt, like the first one, made him deathly sick. Therefore he was not in the habit of boasting much of his virtue in that particular.

Rush took out a chart or map as he spoke, and spread it out on the floor. It was a map of a section of the Adirondack wilderness, and as he bent over it, pencil in hand to trace out their course, his finger rested

on a spot which indicated their present location.

"Two hours more of traveling, and we will be on the spot where the fun is to begin," he declared.

"Pretty soon after breakfast to-morrow, then," said Gray.

Vinton looked on, but it would have been plain to any observer that he knew little of the significance of what Rush had said.

But now Phil turned to him and said:

"I didn't intend to keep you out of it so long as this; but you know we have had little time to talk without being overheard by Joe. And of all persons, I don't want him to get an inkling of the truth until we are obliged to let it out."

"I have simply trusted," grinned Vint.

"Like any innocent, of course. Well, your blind faith shall have its reward. You knew I had an uncle?"

"I've merely had your word for it, but in the absence of contradictory testimony, I have been willing to accept your statement as true."

"Thanks for your confidence. Well, the uncle is no fiction, and he had a piece of property up in this region which he sold to me. Two weeks after the deed passed between us, I learned why he wished to sell."

"The sell was on you?"

"In a way."

"And the land bought by you hath no existence—in other words, the place where it should be is a great, big vacuum?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Dispute about the boundary. I come here to survey it for myself. And on my way, while in New York, I heard that a gang of men were cutting timber on land which my deed says belongs to me."

Vint whistled.

"Which explains why our cartridge shells

are loaded with bullets!" he muttered. And Rush nodded grimly.

CHAPTER III.

THE LUMBER CAMP.

Rush was awakened before dawn, chilled to the marrow. He drew the blankets close about him; but they felt terribly thin, and he wondered if the weather clerk had dropped some zero temperature onto them without warning, for the evening had been delightfully mild.

For ten minutes he lay and shivered, too lazy to try to remedy his plight, as everybody will be when they find themselves too cold when in bed.

For who has not curled up and chattered his teeth rather than draw up an extra blanket?

But Rush had slept enough, so he grew ambitious and got up to investigate.

"What in the name of smoke! Thunder!" he gasped.

There was only a single blanket over his chilled legs, and the door of the lodge was open a crevice, letting in a cool draught.

"Vint's work, I'll wager! Thought he'd cool my temper on the eve of the battle. Well, he can't do it, for I'm mad clean to the top of me, and not in the legs alone."

Rush got up silently and drew on his trousers, glancing over at Vint's corner, with vengeance in his heart. But the big fellow was stirring restlessly, as if he, too, were feeling chilly.

Phil stepped over to his side silently and cautiously felt of the covering.

He repressed the ejaculation of astonishment which rose to his lips.

Vint, too, was lying under a single blanket!

Joe was snoring, and Gray lay motionless as a log. In turn Rush felt of the covering over each of them, and he found that

there was neither more nor less than there had been when they had gone to bed.

At the same time his eye noted a fourth form stretched on the floor of the lodge, close to the stove.

A stride carried him to the side of the figure, and a sweep of the hand drew down the covering, which consisted of four warm blankets and Gray's overcoat!

In the semi-gloom he saw a face, with wide open eyes, and a finger on its lips in token of silence. And so, for a minute the two stared at each other.

"Professor Parker!" whispered Rush.

"The same," assented the stranger, in a like cautious tone.

"You—you swiped my blankets!" exclaimed Rush.

"Two of them, and two from your chum. I was perfectly impartial," smiled the professor.

Rush saw the ludicrous side of it, and let out a roar of laughter.

"That was the coolest piece of business I ever struck yet!" he cried.

"You were cooler than I, let me venture!" said the professor. "And yet I was cold when I stole into your lodge at about midnight, after having roosted in a tree for three mortal hours. You will not betray me to old Griggs? As a special favor to me?"

"Griggs the name of the constable?"

"He is so called."

"I'm solid against him, Professor Parker. But what do I know about you?"

"Very little, I will admit. I might tell you my story; it might be written, and it would take little embellishment to make it read like a novel, or it would make a good drama. You have not time now to listen. I have had pains and penalties, and I am not a saint, yet I am not the only sinner out of jail and unhung. I am poor, I was cold and hungry, I will be grateful for the least favors and

for greater in proportion. Do I make myself clear?"

"Not entirely so, but I will trust you to the extent of a breakfast. Then you will have to shift for yourself, unless——"

"Unless what?" queried Professor Parker, sitting up.

"No matter; you shall have your breakfast, and then we will see about it. Have you seen anything of Griggs since you lit out so sudden last night?"

"From my perch in a tree. He pitched camp right close to where I was concealed, and I had to move light not to rouse him."

"How far from here?"

"Not more than a quarter of a mile."

"Then he will be here after you in an hour."

"He cannot have me, Mr. Rushington. I will never be his. Now let me mention something before your comrades wake."

"What is it?"

"You are in this region for something besides sport. You come about a timber tract about which there is a boundary dispute!"

Rush would not have been more astonished if the other had knocked him down.

"You know nothing about it!" Phil exclaimed.

"I know about the boundary wrangle, for it is no new thing. Some of the property belonged to a man by the name of Rushington, and I have heard that he sold it. On your team, as a part of your outfit, I saw a surveyor's tripod——"

"A photographer's——"

"I insist that it was a surveyor's," smiled Parker. "The reason I know is, that I am a civil engineer by profession—and some other things besides. I could assist you. Or, if engaged on the other side, I could assist your enemies. I seek employment."

Phil's wits were lively while the eccentric stranger was speaking, but he came to no

decision then. Still, it was clear that Professor Parker was a man who must be reckoned with sooner or later.

At this juncture Vint sprang up with a shiver and a groan. That roused Gray and Joe.

"Where—where are my blankets?" demanded the big fellow.

"Right here, my friend—many thanks for the loan of them!" said Professor Parker, who hastily rolled them up and fired the roll at the head of Vint.

"Confound you!" howled Vint.

Back came the bulky roll, with the big student's muscles behind it, and Professor Parker went over onto his back.

It was now light enough so that the professor was recognized, and when explanations were made, all agreed that the stranger was nobody's fool, even though he might be a jail-bird.

He did justice to the breakfast which was served directly, and amused them the while with anecdotes which kept them roaring with laughter.

Joe got the team ready, the lodge was taken down, everything loaded on, and they were ready to start a little after sunrise. The professor did no work, but he kept the funny stories going, and when the start was made he fell into the track with Rush and Gray. Vint had gone on ahead with Joe.

"So you think you are with us to stay?" Rush asked with a keen look into the eyes of the stranger.

"As you please about that. But I am bound for the same destination, unless I am wholly at fault in the guess I made. I will go ahead of you, behind, or with you, as you may prefer. But I go anyhow."

"Not if I say nay, professor," said Rush.

The eyes of the pair met, and each knew that it would be a fight of one strong will

against another of nearly equal force if it were a fight at all.

"I am outnumbered, I admit, and you could tie me up to a tree to freeze, or for Griggs to find. Or you might take me along as a prisoner, which would embarrass you. Why not compromise, and make good use of me? Regular rations and a little money to buy more with after I leave you, and you will find me the handiest baggage in your whole kit!"

"That's right, Rush, and we can chuck him through a hole in the ice when we get to a lake or river if he isn't square," was the first comment made by Grayson.

Phil had already decided to keep the fellow with them as long as he acted on the square.

"Very well!" said Rush. "But if he is treacherous, off goes his head! That doesn't imply that I suspect him of treacherous intent. I believe, Mr. Parker——"

"Professor Parker," the other corrected, with his blandest smile.

"I believe, Professor Parker, that you are a man of talent under a cloud, but appreciative of a square deal."

The professor thrust out his hand, with the ends of his fingers sticking out through the holes in the gloves.

"We are friends, Mr. Rushington. I am temporarily under a cloud; but I perceive a gleam of clear sky, and I propose to make the most of it. Pecuniary embarrassment throws down many good men. Kings have been thus embarrassed. Philosophers are proverbially poor. Geniuses have starved, while pigs have fattened in plenty. You smoke, Mr. Grayson?"

Parker produced a cigar case containing two cigars of a quality which Gray readily recognized.

"A pipe mostly," said Gray.

"These cost me a dollar, the two of them,

in Albany—Utica, I mean—and they are all I have. I can see that you are a judge of special leaf. Oblige me, Mr. Grayson?"

Gray accepted the bribe and they lit up, and a fragrance that made Rush wish he were a smoker filled the air.

They tramped on, the professor talking and telling stories. At last they came up with Joe and Vint, who were in consultation.

"Zere is a lumber camp right close ahead! Hear ze saws go swish—swish—hey?" said the Frenchman.

It was so. There was also the sound of axes, and Rush grimly consulted his chart. He had kept a record of the distance traversed, and he knew that his chart was an accurate one.

A little calculation settled the matter, so far as his papers were concerned.

"The lumbermen are on my property!" he said in a low tone to Gray. "Those axes and saws are eating into my trees! Think of that!"

"There are two things possible," said Gray. "I have told you already what they are."

CHAPTER IV.

FACE TO FACE WITH A TYRANT.

John Grayson was studying law, although he was more than forty years old.

"If I can't be a young lawyer, I can at least be a new one," he was wont to say.

The two things possible for Rush to do, in the case of the boundary dispute, and in the event of the lumbermen being actually at work on his tract, were these: If the foreman of the gang were tractable—a kind of man to listen to reason—he might be induced to take his gang off the work pending an investigation into the claims of Rushington.

Of this there was a lingering hope in the heart of Phil.

But Gray was not so hopeful.

"Bosses in business of this kind are not sentimental on points of honor and obligation," he said.

"Well, if he is obdurate, what can I do?"

"Go back to the county seat, present your case to a judge, and get an injunction issued to stop the cutting until the justice of your claims can be established."

"Which might take a month!"

"Not so long as that, if you got it at all."

"I might fail to get the injunction?"

"Sure. It would depend on the pull you are able to fetch."

"It hangs by a slim thread. I wish I had a gang of men with shotguns. Then I would issue the injunction and enforce it myself!" said Rush.

"Even that might work, if you had the nerve to put her through," said Gray, deliberately. "Only, if you failed, it would go hard with you. Any kind of success is better than any kind of failure in this world, my boy!" smiled Gray. And Rush was to learn in after years, as many another has done, that his friend had spoken a sound saying.

Vint, Rush and Gray now held a deliberate consultation. Professor Parker stood apart, whistling a lively air with all the melody of a flute. He did not seem to have a care in the world, although he well knew that at that moment an officer of the law was thirsting for his blood, and that he might soon again be alone and fleeing in the great wilderness for his liberty.

At the end of the pow-wow of the three friends Rush approached the professor.

"Who bosses the gang at work yonder—do you know?" he asked.

"A Western man by the name of Rock. He has done the same business in the lumber regions from Maine to Oregon."

"Is he a reasonable man to deal with?"

"Yes, if you come to his terms."

"And if you run against them?"

"He would run you out of these woods at the muzzle of his gun. He has shot down more than one ugly chopper, it is said, and they are as afraid of him as they would be of a regiment of Pinkerton men."

"Then he would not be the sort of man to take his gang off the work because there was a question as to the title of his employers in the timber land?"

Professor Parker smiled.

"If you have a seal of authority of any kind with you, then Rock would bow to it, and shake hands with you as he went; but if you have only your word and that of your friends, he would set the whole gang onto you with their axes, and tell them to make mince-meat of you!"

"All right; we'll give those fellows a feast on mince-pie within a day or two!" said Rush.

Vint stared.

"You don't mean to say that you will quarrel with a man of that sort if he refuses to listen to reason?" the big fellow questioned.

"I shall make a demand, and if there is any quarrel, it will be Rock and not Rush who will begin it," said Phil.

"And I am with you, Rush," said Gray, quietly.

"And you, Professor Parker?"

"Sincerely yours, until death do us part!" said the professor, in his airiest manner, and with a dramatic little wave of his worn-out glove.

After all, there was something in the man's voice which bespoke feeling of a genuine kind, and Rush experienced an impulse toward confidence in him such as he had not felt before.

"This is a serious case, if I decide to carry out the plan with which I started," said Phil.

"I must give you a share of my confidence

at this stage of affairs if you are disposed to share the risks with us."

"What are risks to a man who has a career behind rather than ahead of him?" exclaimed Professor Parker, with a tragic gesture.

"You are young to talk in that fashion," laughed Gray. "Better leave such things to be said by old fellows like me."

"What makes age?" demanded the professor. "Is it years and days? Does the swing of a clock's pendulum affect the life of a man? Or is he molded by experiences—by joys and sorrows? I see by your face, Mr. Grayson, that you comprehend me. These youths are at the threshold of life: they have but sipped at the cup."

"Don't be sure on that score, so far as it concerns Phil Rushington," said Gray.

"That's right," Vint agreed. "As you say, he knows that years don't make up the whole of life."

The eyes of Professor Parker and Rush met, and there was a silent meaning in the look, although not a word was spoken.

Rush told Parker all that was necessary about the mission which brought him to this region.

"Then not until now did you know to a certainty that timber was being cut on your domain?" the professor asked.

"Not positively. Even now I have not surveyed the bounds, and when I have done so, it may appear that I have borrowed too much trouble. And yet, according to my chart of the property, we have already crossed the line, and are now on my land. There is hardly a doubt of it. You say, Professor Parker, that you are a civil engineer?"

"I would modestly affirm that I have accomplished some important work as a surveyor for a railway company near Albany—Utica, I mean."

"Then we will go into camp at once and

begin our survey along the bounds at this side of the tract. It is early in the day, and within a few hours the most essential part of my claim may be established."

With Rushington, to direct was to see accomplished.

The others fell to under his commands as if he were a military commander.

A good spot for a more permanent encampment was chosen and the lodge set up. The surveying instruments were taken out and all were soon at work seeking the bounds as described in Phil's papers.

In this seeking the professor proved the value of his acquaintance with the region, for a starting point from which to begin the survey was readily found. Then the work began in earnest.

Within two hours not a doubt remained that the timber cutters were on the land belonging to Rush, and that already considerable lumber had fallen under the axes and saws of the gang.

"What is your verdict, Professor Parker?" Rush asked, when they stopped work for the noon meal.

"To be blunt in terms, it is that of a plain case of timber stealing. I don't believe there is any mistake on their part. Such blunders do not occur. I have other reasons for saying this."

"Other reasons, professor?"

"I know the other claimant of this land—a little—personally."

"His name is Wigson, I believe?"

"Ashael Wigson, of Albany—Utica, I mean!"

"No, of Albany. You got it right the first time."

"Formerly of Utica, since I could not have seen him in the first named city," persisted the professor.

"What do you know about him?"

"I could not characterize him fully with-

out using very blunt terms. I believe he would not hesitate to take any advantage. He is a snide—to be blunt. There is not another like him in Aiban—I mean, in Utica."

"All right. Now I'm ready to call on Rock, the boss of the gang," said Rush.

He was the coolest one of the four, not counting Joe, who knew little of what was in the wind.

"At the noon hour we may find Rock at liberty in his own cabin. So I propose to give him a call at once."

Vint and Gray, representing, respectively, size and maturity, volunteered to accompany him. In ten minutes they had come upon a group of the workmen eating their dinner in one of the rude shanties which dotted the clearing.

From one of them they were directed to the cabin of the foreman of the gang. The cabin was quite comfortable, and the door was opened by a girl whose beauty of face and grace of form for a moment struck the visitors mute.

"You wish to see my father, Mr. Rock?" she asked.

Her voice was like music. Her eyes seemed to have a world of mischief in them as they looked from face to face of the trio at the door.

Her gaze fell first on the handsome face of Phil Rushington; and after she had glanced at his companions it came back to him, and assumed a coquettish expression which was fairly enchanting.

"Yes, to see Mr. Rock," Rush managed to answer, while he wondered how he would feel raising a furious row with the father of such a beauty.

"He has stepped out for a moment, but you may come in and wait——" the girl started to say, when a crisp voice behind them broke in:

"No, they can't go in and wait. I know

their business already, and they may get! You hear!—make tracks!”

They faced about and saw a burly, but under-sized man menacing them with a leveled rifle!

CHAPTER V.

A SIGNAL FROM THE BOSS.

Vint and Gray had no thought of disputing terms with a man who had the drop on them quite so easy, and they prepared to withdraw from the field without a word. They actually backed away from the door of the cabin, not doubting but Rush would follow.

But Rushington felt that not only the success of this expedition, but possibly that of his entire career, depended on his resoluteness in meeting the first sign of opposition.

It looked to him as a rather high-handed piece of business, to be held up in that fashion when he had called in a civil manner on civil business.

“If I allow him to bluff me at the start, I might as well give up the battle for good and all,” was his thought.

Rock “had the drop.” He looked as if he meant to shoot if his order were disobeyed, and Rush had not the shadow of doubt but such was his real intention.

While Vinton and Grayson began to move away with a genuine purpose of going, Rush made a pretense of doing the same. Then his head suddenly ducked, and to the consternation of his companions, they saw him leap toward the foreman of the timber cutters.

Bang! went the gun, fired involuntarily, for Phil’s change of posture was too sudden to be followed by a change of aim. Then the arms of the Springvale athlete clasped the legs of Rock, a gruff shout rent the air, and the man went down!

The gun was dropped and Vint sprang to pick it up. But somebody was ahead of him—and it was the girl!

He might have snatched it from her grasp; but she was too pretty, and he was too much of a gentleman to be rude! And so she “got the drop” on the Springvale giant, and she held it without a quiver. Not even a feminine exclamation had escaped her; the color in her dimpled cheeks was scarcely heightened; and the movement made in leaping to the side of her father was really the poetry of motion.

Rush was not in a position to take note of these things then, but Gray and Vint saw them, and their sense of the actual danger of the situation was thereby deadened.

For the time Rush was little better off than he would have been had he been alone.

The girl, however, with all of her nerve, made one great mistake. Had she covered Rush with her aim then she would have made the resistance of all of them entirely ineffectual.

As it was, when Rock tried to rise, Rushington stood over him, and said:

“Lie still!”

And, for the moment, the man thought it better to follow the advice.

“I came to talk business, and not to fight, Mr. Rock,” said Rush.

“There’s only one kind of business that I can attend to, and that can’t be done with talk. I boss my gang, and that is work. When I have to fight, I call that play. Thena!”

“Yes, father,” responded the girl, without taking her eyes from the mark at which she was directing her aim.

“Shoot the big fellow, and then knock this one over with the gun! Haven’t I told you never to parley when the odds were against us?”

Vint felt a queer sensation creep up the

length of his spine. If the girl had been brought up to perfect obedience then he was a goner, and he felt as a man does when he is condemned to death by a court-martial.

But Thena Rock was a girl, after all, and Vint was not a desperado. Instead of firing at Vinton, she shifted her aim, so as to cover Phil Rushington.

This was anticipated by Rush, however, and for the first time—almost—in his life, he threatened a man with a revolver, which until then had reposed in his hip pocket.

"Shoot me, young lady, and the gang will be without a boss!" he said, with the muzzle of his weapon within four inches of the man's nose.

A girl of a different quality might have lost her head and fired. In that event, Rush would have sent a bullet into the brain of the man, as the last act of his expiring life.

But she recognized the quality of the young fellow with whom she had to deal. Besides, he was handsome, and she admired his nerve as well as his strength and symmetry.

"We won't do any shooting, father," she said, decisively. "You know I never believed in it, in camp, except in self-defense. What is the matter with finding out what these gentlemen want? That one gave you a pretty throw, anyhow, and you might as well own up to it!"

This gave Vint and Gray back their presence of mind. Vint towered above Rock beside Rush, while Grayson drew nearer to the girl to forestall treachery.

"I had to do it, Miss Rock," smiled Rush. "I would be pleased to let him up if I could be assured that he would play a fair game."

"Promise to talk with the gentlemen, and then let them get out of the camp, father," insisted the girl.

"You give orders to me, Thena!" exclaimed the tyrant.

"You know that is nothing new, father, and that I do it often. You will take them from nobody else in the world, and you know it—unless they have the drop on you."

Rock sat up, but Rush did not stir an inch from his position.

"That is far enough, Mr. Rock, unless you are prepared to take your daughter's advice," Rush admonished.

"Don't be foolish, father!" pleaded the girl.

Still the man made as if he would spring to his feet.

Quick as a flash, the left hand of Rushington took him between the eyes and sent him onto his back again.

"Gray, see if he has any pistols or knives in his pockets," Phil ordered.

Grayson advanced to make the search, while Rock snarled and writhed, although he did not again attempt to rise.

"Keep your hands off my father, Mr. Grayson!" exclaimed Thena Rock.

"It is my order that counts, Gray, until Mr. Rock and I exchange positions," said Rush.

Gray knew that the girl was covering him with her rifle, but life was not such a precious thing to him that he could afford to back down for the sake of saving it. At the same time, he had made up his mind that there would be no shooting done as long as Rushington held the trump-card in the game.

He bent over Mr. Rock and made a quick but thorough search for weapons. He found a pistol and an ugly-looking knife, of which he took possession.

The girl bit her lip as she saw her threat defied. She really wondered why she allowed the affair to go on; and she explained it to herself on the ground that Rushington could readily have shot her father if she had attempted to interfere.

"Now, Mr. Rock, you can get up," said Rush.

The man complied, and would have walked out toward one of the big shanties of the workmen, had he not been detained by a command to halt from the lips of Phil.

"We come on business, and I thought you would at least have the sense to hear what we had to say," said Rushington.

"I said in the first place that I knew what brought you here," retorted the man.

"Well, then, if you know our business to start with, so much of our wind and our time are saved. I understand that you are cutting this timber for a Mr. Wigson, of Utica?"

"Of Albany," snapped Rock, who seemed to have decided that he would have to temporize with a young fellow who could throw him on his back and then keep him there with a pistol at his head.

"Of Albany, then. You knew there was a question about the bounds of the property claimed by this Wigson?"

"I had heard something about it, but it is nothing to me."

"It is something to me, when I find you cutting trees on land which I have surveyed, and which I can prove belongs to me."

"Belongs to you—a boy?"

"It belongs to me, as I can show by papers at hand, and with the proof of my identity which my companions are ready to furnish."

"Carry your complaint to Mr. Wigson, then. I have nothing to do with it."

"I want the work stopped, pending a decision in the courts of the dispute. Having just made a survey of one side of the property there can be no question as to what verdict will be rendered. I appeal to you now, as a matter of reason and common sense."

"It is nothing to me. Get an order from the court and I will obey it."

"That will take time, and meanwhile you have a big gang of men cutting the timber."

"If the case goes your way you can sell the timber as it lies, and so make yourself whole."

"You know nothing about it. I have had an offer for the property with the timber standing, and if you continue cutting it may cost me the chance of immediate sale. I will show you my proofs, Mr. Rock, but no more trees can be cut after to-day."

"I care nothing about your proofs."

"You would keep on cutting even if you knew my claim was good, unless you were ordered off by Wigson or by the court?"

"That's the idea, young fellow."

"Then I shall hold you personally responsible, and I call upon Mr. Grayson, Mr. Vinton and your daughter to witness my statement," said Rushington, in a tone of determination.

"That is bluff, youngster! Now, do you know what I am going to do if you are on these premises after I call the men to work? There are a hundred of them and not a man who dares to disobey an order from me. So watch out, my bantam!"

As the man spoke, a shrill whistle rang from his lips and the workmen came swarming from their quarters.

CHAPTER VI.

AN AUDACIOUS PLAN.

It was an exciting and a critical moment, as Phil Rushington and his comrades well knew.

There were not less than fifty men in the gang, and the number might possibly have been double that number.

There was no further use in lingering for the purpose of talking with the boss of the gang, for the latter had already declared that he would not parley over the question. When a man of his sort assumes a position it is a matter of pride to him that persuasion or reasoning shall not swerve him from his purpose.

Indeed, had Rush been in Rock's place at

that moment, having gone so far in his refusal to consider any proposition, he would not have surrendered without resistance.

The trio exchanged glances. Rush gave the signal for a retreat. Rock was disarmed, but the rifle was still at the shoulder of the beautiful girl, and Phil's eyes sought her face.

She was looking at him earnestly at the moment, and her eyes told him to go, as plainly as eyes could speak. She was afraid that he would act under a merely obstinate impulse, and throw away his life in a vain fight.

"We have nothing to gain by staying to talk with a man who is bound to do what he has started out to do, right or wrong," said Rushington, his voice evincing no sign of excitement. "So, boys, we will go and proceed along other lines. But Mr. Rock will find that there is a way to stop his gang from cutting the timber on my land."

Phil stepped quickly toward Thena Rock. The latter lowered her rifle, and her eyes brightened as they looked into those of the Springvale athlete.

"We have acted on the square so far, Miss Rock, haven't we?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Rushington," she replied.

"Then you will guarantee to us a safe retreat from the camp, under the terms of an ordinary truce?"

"If you go directly back to your own quarters," she said.

"We will do that. Thank you, dear," added Rush, softly, so that the words reached no ears but hers.

Had the same words been uttered by either of Phil's companions, Thena Rock would have interpreted them as insulting in their intent. But Rush had such a courtly way of speaking, and his face and airs bespoke so much of good breeding and deference, that it was hard to take offense at anything he might say.

So her beautiful face flushed to a crimson

hue, and her eyes looked more than ever glorious, and the dimples in her cheeks deepened with a half repressed smile.

"You deserve that I should not let you go, for that," she said, also in a tone which only he could hear.

"The penalty wouldn't be so bad, if the crowd was a smaller one," laughed Rush. Then he added:

"I shall depend on you to see that the terms of the truce are carried out. And it is a sure thing that we shall meet again and, as I hope, on better terms. We are not such a bad lot of fellows, when you are on the right side of us, Miss Rock."

"What are you saying to that fellow?" snapped Rock, turning upon Thena.

"He promised me to go straight from the camp if I would promise him a safe retreat," she replied.

"And you agreed?"

"Yes."

"Give me the gun. You can't make agreements that I am obliged to abide by."

"No, no. They shall be allowed to go in safety from the camp. I have promised—you shall not make me lie to them."

"Give me the gun, and your conscience needn't trouble you because I put my mark on to the ugly young cub who let me have his fist betwixt the eyes. Did I ever take the like of that from man or boy? Give me the gun, I say!"

Vint and Grayson were already going from the camp, and Rush would have done the same had not he seen Rock advance angrily upon his daughter.

She half raised the weapon, as if she would have held him at bay with it. But he was too quick for her, for she naturally hesitated about threatening her father.

He seized the gun with both hands. In a second he would have wrenched it from her grasp. But at the same moment he was al-

most lifted from his feet by a blow under the ear, and he fell to the ground like a log.

Several of the workmen had approached by this time, and from them rose a loud shout of astonishment. One big fellow let out a roar of derisive laughter, and slapped his knees in approval.

"Did ye ivver see the loikes of thet, Moike?" the big laborer yelled as his mate came up.

Both of them were pug-nosed sons of the old soil, and they were, probably, the only men of their class in the whole gang. They had been laborers in New York, but their tendencies were too pugnacious for peace in a city gang, and so they had been arrested so frequently for fighting that they had found it to their interest to go where they would not have to be crowded.

Rock could keep them down to their business without any trouble, for they knew that he would not hesitate to shoot them if they mutinied. But they dearly loved a lively "scrap" just the same, and to see the slender lad from Springvale down the boss of the gang was a sight for the gods.

Rock lay kicking in the snow, but he did not get up immediately. Again Rush stood over him, and at the same time he was reassured by the roar of approval from the two Irishmen.

The hand of Thena caught Phil by the arm. "Go—go," she implored.

"But he will take the gun from you, and order the men to stop us," said Rush.

She thrust the weapon into the hands of the youth.

"Take it and go! None of the men are allowed to carry firearms, so they cannot interfere with you. But lose no time, for my father will try to get even with you for being knocked down before the eyes of his workmen."

Rush realized that the most critical moment of all had arrived.

Vinton and Gray stood at a little distance, ready to throw their lives into the battle, if need be, in defense of Phil Rushington of Springvale.

Never had they admired his coolness and judgment more.

In him the mature mind of Grayson recognized the qualities which make the leaders of men.

"The fellow will always be seen at the head of the procession, no matter what kind of one it may be," was the muttered comment of John Grayson.

Rush knew that there was not a moment to be lost. Yet he caught the detaining hand of Thena Rock in his and gave it a quick, grateful pressure.

"You are a brave girl, and true," he said. Then, with Rock's gun in the hollow of his arm, he ran out to where his companions were waiting for him.

"Now is a good time to be getting out of this," he said.

He struck into a run, and his comrades kept pace with him in silence.

As they reached the edge of the clearing they looked back and saw Rock coming out of his cabin with another gun in his hands, but with Thena clinging to his arm, and evidently begging him not to interfere with the retreat of Phil Rushington.

"It is war, old man," said Vint, in the ear of Phil.

"And who is in it?" laughed Rush.

"That's it! who's in it?" echoed Gray, smiling.

"'Rah—'rah—'rah! Rush — ing — ton!" roared the old Springvale cry from the throat of the young giant, in tones that rang through the silent solitudes of the great forest.

Gray took it up, and the two voices repeated the cry; and then it was repeated by

something ahead of them which was not an echo. It was by the musical tones of Professor Parker, who had been anxiously observing them from the edge of the tree line.

From their rear there also came a shout, and they halted among the shadows to see what it meant.

"Caesar!" cried Vint.

"And Anthony!" muttered Gray.

"Don't forget Cleopatra," murmured Rush. "For, mind you, the girl is a clipper right from Clipperville."

Well might he say so. Thena was still clinging to the arm of her father, and boldly standing between him and the men. The two Irishmen were beginning to feel the stir of the blood of their ancestors in their veins, and having seen a boy knock down their boss, their fingers itched to show him that they were not mummies, but men of the century.

The rest of the gang were ready enough to yield to discipline the moment that it should be established. Rock was yelling some orders to them, but the Irishmen had started a Tipperary song in voices like that of a trumpet, and the hard consonant sounds of their native tongue drowned the voice of the angry boss.

Professor Parker was at the side of Rushington, rubbing his ragged gloves together excitedly.

"There'll be a mutiny! There'll be a mutiny!" he exclaimed.

"Let her go," smiled Phil Rushington.

At the same time, however, he saw something significant in the eyes of the professor, and as if there was a sort of telepathy, or thought-transference between them, he caught a suggestion which the next moment was put into words.

"Mutiny against one commander makes a vacancy to be filled by a new one—doesn't it, Professor Parker?" he exclaimed.

A ragged glove was outstretched, and the

bare, chilled fingers gave the hand of Phil Rushington a responsive grip.

"You've caught it, Rushington. But seize the moment—seize the moment!"

Vint and Gray understood, and the audacity of the scheme possessed them.

"As proprietor of these lands, I am about to take possession," cried Rush. "Come, for to back down now is worse than death."

"And death itself, if I figure it right," said Gray.

Back toward the spot where the crew of lumbermen were huddled, in an excited group, ran Rushington, and three invincible comrades kept abreast of him. And the Irishmen, with a yell of welcome, started to meet them.

But the report of Rock's rifle smote the air, and one of the laborers fell, reddening the snow where he lay.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST VICTORY.

The Irishman who fell was not mortally hurt. Perhaps it would have been better for Rock had he been so. From the one who had applauded Rush when he had knocked down the boss there now rose an angry shout, which was received by the crowd of timber cutters by a subdued mutter of wrath.

Rushington and his companions reached the side of the fallen man, and Gray bent over him with a gentle effort to discover the extent of his injury. Dan Byrnes, the one who was unhurt, at the same time laid a hand on the arm of Phil Rushington.

"Give me the gun, me b'y, and see me blow the shtuffin' out o' the spalpane thot did thot!" he cried, pointing down at his fallen comrade.

"Get a shtick, Danny, and smash the mug av 'im, do ye moind!" groaned Mike, as Gray raised him up.

"Take care of him, Gray, for you know

something of surgery," said Rush, speaking in a calm, but commanding tone. "And you, Danny, just a word. I am the owner of this lumber ground, every inch of it. Rock is at work for a thief, and he will not even listen to reason. I tried to be civil with him, but he would have blown out my brains if I hadn't downed him. I have come to take possession. That brute or I is to be boss from now on; in the end, he will have to go, anyway. Which flag do you follow—his or mine?"

"Yees own banner, forivver, me b'y!" cried the Irishman.

"And will you fight, if need be?"

"Loike a sthreak!"

"And the other men of the gang—are they in love with Rock?"

"In loove, is it? Bedad, and they bear him the same koind av loove that Oi fale for a cloob thot has jist hit me in the nick. They are afraid av the spalpane, all roight, because noon av us had the backbone to face him down. But give us a lader, and we'll be afthter groinding down thot Rock until he is as foine as the sands on the sayshore!"

"Then follow me, Danny, and give them to understand that I am a new boss. They won't need many explanations. I will set them to work for the afternoon, and then give them a holiday with full pay and Christmas presents for the first of February. Come, Vint—show the length of you."

Again they advanced. There had been only a moment of delay, and the time had been spent by Rock in trying to get rid of the detaining hands of his daughter.

The latter, indeed, more clearly than her angry parent, realized that a crisis in the rule of the boss had come.

The harder the tyranny, the more complete is the downfall of the tyrant, when his power is once broken.

Forward ran the trio, leaving Gray to patch up the wound received by Mike.

The main gang of workmen was made up of several nationalities, of which Italians predominated.

They were mostly an apathetic lot, easy in temper. But Rock had aroused their hatred at the start, and there were few of them who were not ready to welcome a new boss.

"Here ye are, b'ys, wid a new boss, riddy to knock the sphots out av the owld wan, and to pay yees in goold ivvery night. Down wid owld Rock! Will ye sthand by and say a good man shot down by the loikes o' him? Bad cess to 'im."

It was Danny who uttered these words. And although he was of a different nationality than the others, and he despised the "Oitalians" as he called them, yet there was that in his jolly nature which pleased them, and they would have readily followed his leadership at any time had they not been so sorely afraid of the foreman.

The words of Danny were understood only in part. But enough was clear to them to tell them that the banner of the old leader was in the dust and that of a new one raised in its stead. There was a surge of the crowd toward Rushington, and from them, under the direction of Phil, a dozen of the most intelligent men were chosen.

To the others Rush then said, with all the dignity of a general:

"Go to work, every man of you. I will take care of the other boss. Come to his cabin to-night for your pay—it will be ready."

The men made for the tool-house and seized axes and saws. There was a murmur of excitement among them, but no sign of hesitation.

"The crisis is over, for they obey me," said Rush, in a low tone to Vint.

"You are boss of the gang, all right," said Vint.

The dozen chosen were called around their leader, and in a few words Rushington explained to them all it was necessary for them to know concerning the change in the one in authority over them.

"We do not wish to injure your former boss," he explained. "But I shall order him to leave the place, and you will see that my commands are enforced, in case he tries to put up too much of a fight. Do you understand?"

"Do ye mane to soy thot we're not to break the back av 'im?" demanded Danny.

"No necks are to be broken, unless they try to be too stiff under new authority," said Rush.

The young leader lined up his men in military order, and, leading the way, gave them the signal to advance upon the cabin of Rock.

The latter had not been blind to the rapid change in the aspect of affairs. Incredible as it seemed, he yet realized that a mere youth had robbed him of his command.

He stepped forth, gun in hand, as they approached. Then a no longer tried to restrain him. She saw that the day was lost; and she saw something more—that Phil Rushington was with those who were coming, and to him she already looked for an exhibition of justice, tempered with mercy, such as her father knew not how to exercise.

When the workmen with Phil were within a dozen paces of the cabin, Rock carried the rifle to his shoulder. At the same time Rush called:

"Halt!"

His men obeyed. Rush boldly faced the ex-boss.

"There is no need of our having further trouble, Mr. Rock," he said. "I come to inform you that I have formally taken possession of my property, and I have agreed to pay all wages due the men from my pocket.

There is nothing left for you to do but to report to Mr. Wigson, of Albany."

"Of Utica," murmured Professor Parker.

"Taken possession, eh?" snarled Rock, whose whole body fairly trembled with passion.

"I have stated the fact. I would have been easier about it had you not resisted, and then made matters worse by shooting down one of my men——"

"One of your men!" broke in the man.

"One of my best men," smiled Rush.

"Good for yees, me b'y!" cried Danny.

"And you have also excited the ill will of all of my men by the severity of your rule," continued Rushington. "Otherwise I might allow you to remain as foreman until I no longer needed their services. As it is, I am sorry to say that I shall have no further use for you."

"Wad ye let me have the use av 'im, for the space av tin minutes, and Oi belave Oi could sthir-r the sowl av 'im into repintince for ivver having been creayted, be-gobs!" cried Danny, shaking his big fist at the ex-foreman.

"Shut up, or I'll bore a hole through you," exclaimed Rock, covering the Irishman with his aim.

"Go easy, Danny," admonished Rush.

"Aisy, is it! And it wad be dead aisy for me to smash the head aff 'im, wad ye give me a bit av a show. Make 'im lay down the gun, the cowardly spalpane, and put up the dukes av 'im for a fair foight, and be the same token Oi'd smash 'im antil ye'd nivver foind as much as a grease-shoot!"

Danny's wrath increased with the venting of it in speech, and with Rock glowering at him, it began to look as if Rush would have to let them settle it, hand-to-hand.

"That will do, Danny," Phil ordered, sternly. "I will do the talking, and now that Mr. Rock is no longer your boss you need

have nothing to do with him. If it turns out that your friend is seriously hurt by the shot, I will see that the man answers for it as he deserves. If he believed it was his duty to quell what looked to him like a mutiny, he was justified in using a certain amount of force. Mr. Rock, take my advice and lose no time in getting away from a spot where you are so unpopular that your life may be in danger without my protection. I will guarantee you a safe escort from the camp, if you will go at once. If you linger, I shall not hold myself answerable for what may happen."

At this moment Thena Rock laid one hand on the arm of her father and spoke a few words to him in a low tone.

"You shall not speak a word to him, girl!" cried the man.

"But I must," she said.

"We will go from the camp, until I can return with a new gang and wipe that cowardly crew off the face of the earth."

The man backed away from the spot as he spoke, and it was plain that he intended to make no further resistance, for the time, at least.

But Thena sprang past her father and beckoned to Phil Rushington.

Rush went up to her, and he felt a sense of pity for her as he saw that her bright eyes were dimmed with tears.

"You let me help you to escape when the odds were against you, and then took advantage of my kindness and come back to turn me out of the camp," she said, in a low voice.

"I do not turn you away from the camp. Indeed, if it were suitable for you to stay, I would be only too glad to have you."

"Of course you would say that now. And yet you showed no care as to what became of me when you ordered my father to go."

"What chance had I? Come, Miss Rock, don't blame me. You have done me the greatest service——"

"Yes, I have been the means of putting you in power over these men, and even of saving your life, if you only knew it. You are ungrateful, and I believe that I can make up my mind to—to hate you, after—after I can no longer see you."

Her sweet tones trembled with passion, and she was more beautiful than ever. She turned upon her heel and ran away.

"Don't!" Rush called after her. But she would not again look at him.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PROFESSOR'S SECRET.

Rock's cabin was not in reality so comfortable as the portable lodge which Phil Rushington had brought along.

Now that they were fairly in possession of the lumber camp, Joe was ordered to come in with his load, and Rush and his companions proceeded to get things in shape for staying as long as the conditions might require.

"Well, matters took an easier turn than looked as if they would at the beginning," said Vint, when the lodge was set up and things were made snug, ready for the night which was at hand.

"If this is really the end of the pattie," remarked Professor Parker, who had been fidgeting all the while, as if there was something on his mind which he dreaded to say.

Rush was outside, and the professor and Vint were in the lodge together. So far, the big student had not felt quite sure of the trustworthiness of the jaunty stranger. Indeed, there seemed to be a sort of aversion in each for the other.

Vinton looked down at him quizzically.

"What are you chewing on, Mr. Parker?" he asked.

"Professor Parker, if you please," smiled the other.

"Professor of what?"

"Of many things, all of which I strive to

practice. There are things which I do not profess which I also practice, upon occasion."

"You talk too much through your hat, and your hat isn't a good kind to talk through, anyway," growled Vint.

The big fellow had been aching from the first to say what he thought of the professor, straight, and now there seemed to be an excellent opportunity for doing so.

"Thank you, Mr. Vinton. You are blunt, which is not the worst of qualities. I know you distrust me. I have been shown injustice of many kinds, and it does not cut as it once did. You are at liberty to say what you please, if it does you any good. But I was about to speak in behalf of Mr. Rushington, whom I have good reason to like."

"What were you going to say."

"He is keen, remarkable in all respects, yet so honest that he trusts too far to appearances, while you may not trust far enough."

"What are you driving at? Did you know that you might get at all the meat there is in your discourse with less expenditure of wind, Mr. Parker?"

"Professor," murmured the other. Then he said:

"Words have two uses. One is to communicate ideas, the other to conceal thoughts. Both are legitimate. But you interrupt me with your odious comments, Mr. Vinton—not to be too blunt."

"Go ahead."

"Mr. Rushington evidently believes that he will have no further trouble in holding the camp against the former boss."

"What can Rock do, with all the men against him, and we in possession?"

"The man for whom he worked has another camp about five miles from this one, and more than fifty men at work."

Vint pricked up his ears. He suddenly realized that Professor Parker might, after all, be disposed to do them a service.

"You think he went to that camp?" Vint asked.

"Isn't it likely, Mr. Vinton?"

"Looks like it. But you don't suppose he could get those men to come here and try to take possession again, do you?"

"It would be merely a matter of persuading the boss of the other crew to take a hand in the game."

"But he wouldn't want to mix up in it."

"It is a matter of maintaining discipline over the gangs. One boss is always ready to help out another in case of mutiny for he is liable to need the same aid himself."

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Vint.

"You express yourself mildly, Mr. Vinton."

"See here, professor—you are a brick—not to be too blunt, as you say. Why, old man, pull off that finger-freezer that you wear in the place of a glove, and accept these. I've worn 'em only two days, and I've another pair just like 'em. Wait, shake hands before you put 'em on."

Vinton placed his own elegant fur gloves in the hands of the seedy professor as he spoke. Then they shook hands, and Professor Parker seemed too much touched by the heartiness of the other for a moment to speak.

"You are kind," he said. Then, with an airy gesture, he added:

"You will speak of the matter just mentioned to Mr. Rushington?"

"We'll both do so. Why, if Rock should come down on us with the other gang, and the men should be armed, we would be in for a racket, don't you think?"

"It would be unpleasant, but rather exciting," admitted the professor.

At that moment Rush came in, followed by Gray and Danny. In a few words he was acquainted with the new suggestion of danger.

"I had thought of it, but was not sure that there was another gang near enough to give

us trouble. I intended to ask the professor about it when I got a chance," said Rush.

"Yes, Rush thinks of everything, and he just spoke of it to me," added Gray.

"Let the man show his mug here av he wants to havē it smashed!" cried Danny.

"You had plenty of chance to smash him before you ever saw us, if you were as full of sand as you pretend," laughed Rush.

"A chance, was it? And do ye call it havin' a chance whin a divil kapes his eyes on yees shlapin' an' wakin', with sorra a show for gettin' a whack at 'im' wid axe or club? And, thin, de ye moind thot a man has a different falin' in the heart av 'im whin he has a lader thot will lade, and a foighter on his side thot will foight? It is yersilf thot knows thot Oi wad 'ave had the head knocked aff o' me wid the axes av thim Oitalyans av Oi had so much as lifted me finger forninst me, and thot Rock 'ave been lookin' at me."

Danny got excited whenever Rock was referred to. Mike, his partner who had been shot by the boss, was in shape to creep about the camp, and to whine like a baby over pain which Rush or Vint would hardly have thought of.

"I have already dispatched a messenger to the nearest town for help," said Phil Rushington to his friends, when they were by themselves a little later.

"But will help be sent unless they have proof that you have the authority to hold the camp?" asked Vint.

"No reasonable proof is lacking, and I have sent everything that should be required, with assurance that I will answer to the authorities for whatever has been done or that I may have to do. I refer to my uncle, James Rushington, who is well known as a manager of large interests, and also to Judge Estey, of Albany, who, as you know, is a personal friend and patron of mine. The needed help

will be sent, and Rock nor his other crew will not dare to hold out an hour when they find that the law is against them. He knows well enough that Wigson is a fraud. It is merely a question of our being able to get the help in time."

"How did you send your messenger?"

"On horseback."

"Then he should get back to-morrow night at latest?"

"At latest."

"Gentlemen," said Professor Parker, who had been pacing to and fro in the lodge while they were talking. "Do you know, I believe that my business interests will require that I leave you almost immediately—by to-morrow morning, in any case."

"Why is that, professor?" Rush demanded.

"My—er—interests, Mr. Rushington—"

"I see. You are afraid of the officers who may come to my assistance?"

"I—er—to be blunt, would rather not meet them until after certain of my affairs have been adjusted," admitted the professor.

"What is the matter with you, anyway? Don't be afraid to tell the worst. If you have stolen something, or robbed a bank, or any of those things, tell the truth, and we'll stand by you as far as we can, even though we have to let you go. I don't really believe that you have done anything so very black, for you don't carry the hang-dog look that a man of that kind is apt to wear."

The professor sank on to a stool and covered his face with his hands. For several minutes he did not speak. Then he stood up, and they saw that his face was pale, although there was a sheepish smile that seemed to indicate shame instead of guilt.

"You would despise me, Mr. Rushington, if I were to explain the ignominy of my situation. You are so fearless, and you despise a coward."

"A good man sometimes does a thing that he has reason to be ashamed of."

"True. And to be sorry for, also, without being really at fault. It is so with me. Rushington—you are not a married man?"

"Hardly," laughed Rush.

"Got a girl, though," grumbled Vint.

"Dozen of 'em want him," said Gray.

"It will be many a day before the cards are out, just the same. When a man is married he has to stop seeing the girls when they make eyes at him, and he has to quit playing ball and rowing boats and those things, and get on to the job of heating milk over a lamp at midnight, and walking the floor with his son and heir in the small hours."

The professor did not smile.

"Rushington," he said, gravely, "there was that in the remark of your friend Gray which moves me to utter a warning. One girl is all very well, if she be of the right sort. But a dozen, my young friend, is too many. They are a snare. It is not well to be loved by two, even. Thereby hangs my—er—embarrassment."

"Ow!" howled Vint. "E's got more'n he knows what to do with, so he skips out and leaves the whole of 'em. And they sends bloodhounds of the law out on his trail."

"To be blunt, gentlemen, it was a breach-of-promise suit that cleaned me out of cash. And—again to be frank—another is pending."

There was a roar of laughter, and Rush, Vint and Gray said in chorus:

"We'll stand by you, professor."

CHAPTER IX.

THE ATTACK.

In the roar of laughter that followed, Professor Parker joined most heartily. Now that the odious truth was out he did not seem like the same man.

He was still airy and full of gestures and

bows; but he did not appear so much to fear to say that his soul was his own, or to shrink from looking his new friends in the face.

"The first was the daintiest, most sylph-like being you ever saw," he declared, in further explanation of his predicament. "She was all soul——"

"Feet must have been 'normous," muttered Vint.

"And her voice was like that of a bell——"

"You might have hired her out for a fire-alarm," chuckled Gray.

"While her movements were a poem——"

"A rejected poem," suggested Rush.

"You would never have dreamed that such a girl could have valued her affections in dollars and cents, and sought recourse in the courts for her disappointment"

"How about the other girly—the one who is now after your money or your life?" Vint inquired.

"She, alas——"

"A lass—oh!" interpolated Vint.

"Lasses is awful sweet, boys," whispered Rush.

"Any mo' lasses to be brung into yo' tale, sah?" added Gray.

"Gentlemen, you treat the matter with too much levity, considering the fact that the first woman ruined me pecuniarily, leaving me, as it were, a pauper."

"Too much poetry in her, for poetry, as a steady thing, would ruin any man short of a Kipling."

"Tell us more about the second girl, professor," urged Gray.

"She, as it were, obtained a promise from me—if I were to concede, as my counsel says is unnecessary, that there was any technical promise given—as I was about to say, if there were such a promise, then it was obtained under false pretenses. She came into the village with the airs of a simple maiden, and she was preceded by a story that she had just in-

herited a cool million from an uncle in California."

"That was just after number one had stepped on your pocket book with those enormous feet?" queried Vint.

"Exactly," smiled Professor Parker.

"Go on," cried Rush, breathlessly.

"In short, I snapped at the bait, only to find that a cruel hook was hidden underneath! Ethel—the name of number two—was not sylph-like. Her weight, to be frank about it, is most substantial. She is not beautiful, nor is she gentle, nor good. She is, in short, an infernal fraud, from her big, yellow wig down to her feet—and they are enormous, gentlemen. Her voice is like that of a parrot; her laugh is a cackle; she breathes like a steam road-roller; and the million is a myth—a fly, with which to catch any old fish that may be blamed fool enough to swim toward it. Gentlemen, I could see that woman boiled in oil—to be blunt about it."

The professor was actually in a perspiration when he finished his tale. He went to the door of the lodge to get a breath of fresh air, but came back with a look of alarm on his face.

"There is something wrong with the men down on the edge of the clearing!" he exclaimed.

Rush and his companions sprang to the door. Danny had gone out a few minutes before, and he now came running up.

"The Oitalyans are schared out av their sivin sinses!" he cried.

"What are they frightened at?" Rush demanded.

"They soy thot Rock and a big gang are coming."

"I don't see how they could get around so soon. Why, he has hardly had time to get to the other camp and back again, without making any stop."

"If he is here, then it proves that he didn't

have so far to go as was supposed," remarked Gray.

"One thing is sure—the men are leaving their work and coming this way with their axes. Why, they act like a flock of sheep on a stampede."

It was so. The Italians were coming toward the foreman's lodge in a body, and on the keen run.

"Little use will they be to us in defending the camp if that is all the backbone they've got. I'll have to brace them up with something, if I have to threaten some shooting on my own account," muttered Rush.

The Springvale athlete was in a novel position even for one of his versatile abilities. He had a mixed crew of foreigners to bring under discipline, and to compel them to do the duty of guards against a crowd as rude and undisciplined as themselves.

Rush stepped out in front of the lodge, gun in hand. One of the foremost of the laborers was by this time within signaling distance, and Phil beckoned to him to approach nearer.

The man proved to be one of the most intelligent in the lot—one, in fact, who had once bossed a gang of lumbermen on his own account.

"They not dare to keep workin' when they see old boss coming," he declared, as he came up.

"Then Mr. Rock is really coming back?" Rush asked.

"Yes, with lot of men with him. From other camp, I reckon."

"It was about time to quit work, anyway, but you had no business to leave without the signal to quit. Go back and tell them to line up in front of the cabin and wait for me to give the whistle. Then all advance as usual for your pay. It is ready for you."

"But the other men with the old boss——?" questioned the man.

"We will take care of them when they get here, and not borrow any trouble in advance."

"All right. I tell 'em."

The man went back, and for a few moments Rush could see them exchanging a lively discourse and pantomime, which ended in their drawing up in a line, as directed.

"Now I will act as paymaster. I found the names for pay-roll in a box in Rock's cabin. Each man has a number, and I will call them off while Vint hands out the envelopes. It is lucky I brought the cash so I can pay them from my pocket. Then I will whistle all hands to their quarters."

To the announcement that Rock and another crew of men were at hand, Phil Rushington pretended to pay little heed. His idea was to suppress by an appearance of indifference all inclination to a panic, and at the same time to get the men into a humor to obey him in case he should have to call upon them to fight for him in the end.

To Danny he gave a few orders. Then the signal for the men to "line up" was given, obeyed, and, one by one, they advanced and received the pay envelopes as Vint passed them out.

The short winter afternoon was closing in with clouds and a moderate temperature. A swift wind roared through the tops of the great trees. In front of the lodge Rush had directed a fire to be built, and now, as the flames leaped upward, they fell with a weird glow upon the dark faces of the workmen.

Gray and Professor Parker observed the scene in silence. Both were impressed by the situation, by the measured movements of the men as they advanced to receive their pay, by

a general and indefinable sense of impending danger.

At that distance from civilization, Phil Rushington realized that more depended on the exercise of force than there did on the legal aspect of the case.

If the former foreman succeeded in regaining possession of the camp by force of arms, there would be little chance of the man being punished for his part in the affair, although of course he could be made to surrender the position again to the rightful owner in due course of time, by process of law.

The last of the gang passed in front of the lodge door and received his pay.

Agreeably to Rushington's orders, they halted in a line at a little distance from the young foreman. Each man carried his axe. And now, to their surprise, Rush passed along in front of the line, speaking to each man in turn.

The firelight fell upon the handsome face of Phil Rushington all the while, and the sight of him, with the friendly, yet firm words spoken to each, made every man feel that the young fellow was his friend.

Rush was acting with shrewdness as well as with policy. As the men started for their quarters in obedience to Phil's signal, one of the Italians started a cheer for their new employer and boss.

It was caught up by Danny Byrnes, and a moment after the forest and clearing fairly rang with the enthusiastic and friendly yell from the throats of the timber cutters.

"That boy is a magician," muttered Professor Parker.

"No; he is a thoroughbred gentleman," corrected Grayson.

"That's right," said Vint. "No kind of magic counts like knowing how to treat every man as if he were a man, with a heart and a head to cheer and to teach. That is Rush, every time. But—ah! What is going on yonder?"

Vint pointed toward the black line of uncut forest.

"That fringe of undergrowth seems to have life in it," was Grayson's comment.

Flash—flash—flash! Bang—bang—bang!

The spurting flame told of the discharge of rifles, even before the rattling reports reached the ears of the observers at the door of the lodge.

Rush had spoken a word and given the money to the last man in the line just as the rifle shots broke upon the air. He turned in time to catch the flash of the last of the shots.

"Men!" he called, without a tremor in his tones. "You will get under cover, so none of the bullets can nip you. But if that crew gets fairly into camp, and tries to take possession, I'll give the word for all hands to sail into them. Quick! make for cover! There are only three rifles in the crowd, and we have as many. It will be a fight with axes, if it gets to be a fight of any kind."

Gray and Vint retreated into the lodge. But Rush, just as he reached the door, was sure that he saw a shadowy form skulk around to the rear of the cabin.

He sprang silently in pursuit—reached the cabin—sped around the corner of it—and nearly stumbled over a crouching figure close to the wall.

"Thena Rock!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

"Yes," exclaimed the girl.

Thena Rock rose to her feet, and Rushington could see that she was trembling with excitement.

"I came to warn you," she said, before he could again speak.

"To warn me?" repeated Rush.

"There are fifty men from another camp down yonder, and my father has brought them to recover possession of this, and he says that he will not leave a man of this gang to tell the story if they put up a fight against him. I came to tell you."

The girl spoke rapidly, and it seemed as if she hardly knew what she was saying. Before Rush could reply, she turned with the evident intention of running away from him.

He caught her arm and detained her.

"I expected something of the sort," said Rush. "I am ready for what may come, and he won't drive me out of the camp. This is my property, and I will not be driven off from it. If his men trespass, I shall set my hundred men on to them, with orders to defend themselves and the camp against the lawless crew. You may warn your father, if you wish."

"You had better go back and get authority, Mr. Rushington, and then there will have to be no fight. You are so young, and you might—but I must go. You needn't thank me."

"But I do thank you, Thena Rock. It was brave of you to come to tell me. Your father did not send you?"

"Oh, no. He would kill me, I believe, if he knew I did it."

"Then you took a great risk. He may suspect when you get back to him. You had better stay here, for the battle is bound to go our way in the end, and I shall not parley if he really makes an attack."

"No, no—I must go back."

There was the crunching of a heavy tread in the crusty snow, and the girl tried to break away from the hand of Phil Rushington. But the latter, looking past her into the grayish gloom, saw the burly form of her father springing toward them with a recklessness born of the wildest rage.

The man it seemed, had observed her when she stole back into the camp. Suspecting her purpose he had followed her.

Rock's anger was not so intense at that moment against Rushington as toward his child. To him her act seemed to be one of treachery, and he was in a perfect frenzy.

He caught her fiercely by the arm, a harsh cry bursting from his lips. Rush released her, for the man would have rended her arm from her shoulder had he not done so.

She uttered a terrified scream, for she believed that she was abandoned to the mad rage of her father. But even as she did so she saw Phil Rushington send out a blow, straight from the shoulder, as she had seen him do once before.

Could he have had a fair chance at the man, the latter would have been felled by the blow. As it was, the fist could only strike the shoulder of Rock which paralyzed the arm that held Thena.

The latter was released, for the grasp became instantly a nerveless one. Then, with a hoarse cry, the man turned upon Phil Rushington.

The latter saw a knife gleam in a ray of light from the fire which blazed in front of the lodge—and Rock held the weapon.

The man leaped upon Rush before the latter could send out his invincible fist a second time, and the youth found himself engaged at close quarters by an adversary who was in a mood to seek his life.

To avoid a slash from the knife, Rush had to act warily. He flung both arms about his foe, and so pinioned down the death-dealing hand for the moment. Thus embracing, the twain fell upon the ground, and struggled there with all the desperation of a life and death combat.

Rush had no weapon of the kind with which he was assailed, and had he possessed one it is doubtful if he could have brought himself to make use of it.

So, for a minute or two, no advantage was gained by either of the combatants. For that period Rush had all he could do to protect himself from what might have been a fatal cut with the ugly implement.

Then he got a grip on the man's wrist, so as to hold the dangerous hand. That left one of his own free.

There was short space in which to get up steam for a crack at the man's head with a clenched fist. But Rushington made the most of the close range; and what was lacking in the first hit was made up by repeating it with scarcely a second's interval between the two blows.

Rock fell back with a groan. A deft twist took the knife from his grasp, which was loose upon the haft; and then the Springvale athlete sat astride of his vanquished foe and let out a lusty shout.

"Vint, old man," he called. "Come and help me tie up the game."

The struggle had taken place so close to the back of the lodge that both Vint and Gray had caught some of the sounds of it, and they were already out looking for mischief.

Vint was the first on the ground.

Thena Rock confronted him, pistol in hand—true to her kin to the last. But the big student saw what was up—or, rather, what was down.

"Don't bother, little girl," he said, his big voice so gentle that she looked up at him in surprise instead of using her pistol. He put her aside so easily that she hardly felt that he did so by actual force, although he lifted her off her feet and set her down again as if she were a child.

Rock was bound hand and foot in short metre, and he had little vim left in him for keeping up even a show of fight.

"You saw that I had to do it, Miss Rock," said Rush, as he again confronted the girl.

"What will you do with him?" she demanded.

"Keep him out of harm's way in the cabin which he deserted until the officers for whom I have sent arrive. He would have killed you just now if I had not been at hand—he was beside himself with rage."

"You are safer just now, little girl, with the old gent in the shambles," smiled Vint. "And you may reckon on being treated like a lady, for Phil Rushington, of Springvale, is the right man in the right place, when it comes to looking out for the safety of a lady. I'm not so full of politeness as he is, but if he wasn't always ahead of me, I would make a record in the same line."

"You are both gentlemen—and I have known in my life too few who were like you," said the girl in a low voice.

Rock was placed in his own cabin under guard. Then Rush held a brief consultation with Gray and Vint.

"That crowd from the other camp must get out of our way," was Phil's decision.

"Hadn't we better wait now until the officers arrive?"

"No. The leader had to cave, and the thing to do is to show that I am boss of the camp, and that I will allow no meddling from any other camp."

"What will you do?" asked Vint. "You know that Gray and I are ready to wade in when you say the word."

"You will stay here, Gray, and see that Rock is properly guarded, for I believe Danny is ugly enough to chop the man in pieces if he had the chance. Vint and I will go down to the quarters of the men, and with seventy-five of them, we will make a drive for the crew down there among the trees. They must not trespass on my domain."

"Good, Rush—that's the stuff!" cried Vint.

In ten minutes the timber-cutters, under the leadership of Phil Rushington, issued forth from their shanty in a solid phalanx, each man carrying his axe with military precision.

Across the clearing they marched, while the voices of the two students from Springvale rang out in a perfect chime to the tune of a stirring march.

The woods seemed to be full of the melody, for Vint and Rush could sing together so that their voices blended like the notes of a single instrument.

As they reached the edge of the wooded

line they beheld dozens of men scurrying hither and thither. They did not know what had become of their leader.

"Now, boys, give 'em your axes, right in the neck!" shouted Rush.

"Right in the neck—neck—neck!" chanted Vint.

"The axe—the axe—the axe," chimed in Rush.

"Where—where—where?" howled Vinton.

"In the neck—neck—neck!" they roared with a tenor and bass which were in perfect accord.

The charge was made—and it was not of a light brigade, either, for there did not have to be much heroism thrown into it. The enemy made almost no show of resistance. In one or two places opposing axes met and flashed fire in the darkness. Rushington's crew had orders not to hurt a man of the enemy except in actual self-defense, so the sally was in reality no more than a bluff.

There was a perfect pandemonium of yells. Men with lanterns darted away into the depths of the forest. There was a show of pursuit made, just to insure an absolute flight. Then the noise subsided and the battle was over.

"The field is won, and without bloodshed, and only a few sore heads," said Vint.

They marched back to the lodge, while the men went to their quarters, laughing and singing.

The boys went to bed and slept until sunrise.

When they awoke they found Professor Parker munching a sandwich and making ready for departure.

"With regrets, gentlemen," he declared, sorrowfully.

"Then you don't dare to face the officers who are expected this morning?" exclaimed Rush.

"I feel that Ethel will be with them. She is more persistent than a score of bloodhounds."

"We will protect you, professor," laughed Gray.

"Against men or hounds, I doubt not. But not against Ethel. That would be beyond human power. No, I feel that I must go. But we shall meet again. Fate will so will it. Even Ethel will have to succumb to the ravages of time. We shall meet again."

He shook their hands, and while they laughed uproariously, he seemed to be in dead earnest.

He waved them an adieu as he reached the edge of the forest, and then disappeared, swinging his arms jauntily.

"Poor professor," said Rush. "How shall we next see him?"

How?—the reader may also ask. Only time could tell, but see him again we surely will.

The officers sent for by Rush arrived two hours later, but there was nothing for them to do except to take Rock in charge. He was not arrested, but merely taken to the town and set at liberty, with a warning that he must not try to regain possession of the camp.

Other charges were pending against Wigson, and no trouble was experienced in establishing the claims of Phil Rushington to the timber land as specified in the papers held by him. All that would have been required from the first was a correct survey, with

DO AND DARE WEEKLY.

some one with the backbone to enforce the rightful claim.

Rush spent two weeks in sport with his companions. Then they went to the town and effected a sale of the property.

They saw Thena Rock, and she told Rush that she would not again dare to stay with her father in a lumber camp.

When she bade them good-by, it was not without a sweet glance for Vint, which haunted the dreams of the big student for many a night.

Rush was summoned home by his uncle by a note which contained this passage:

"Certain securities which I into some time ago had ceased to be profitable, thrown back on to our hands. They consist of an excellent theatrical outfit, upon which it is possible you will deem it advisable to realize something, at least. The matter demands your gravest consideration."

"Whew!" whistled Rush.

Yet he little dreamed of what importance to him the matter was to become.

THE END.

The next number of the DO AND DARE WEEKLY will contain "Phil Rushington's New Rôle; or, 'The Play's the Thing.'"

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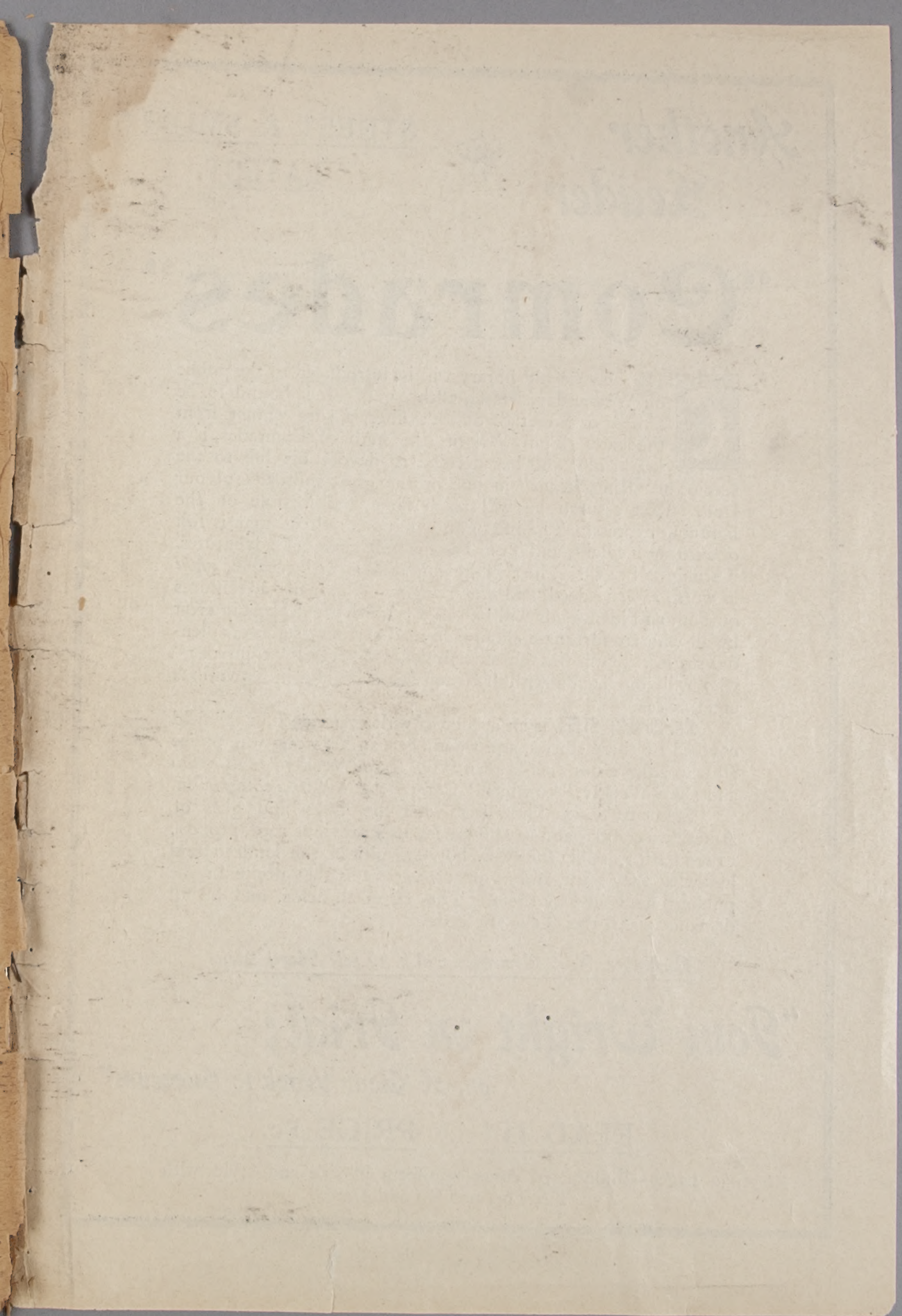
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